

## What Law School Should Teach, But Often Doesn't

By **Kevin Penton**

Law360 (September 2, 2022, 12:19 PM EDT) -- Law school focuses on teaching how to practice law. But for Osato F. Chitou, it should also emphasize how to be a healthy human being who practices law.

The distinction is critical for associates who burn out after allowing their first jobs after law school to dominate their lives, said Chitou, a former co-director of the Young Lawyers Division of the New Jersey Women Lawyers Association.

Chitou and other attorneys recently shared with Law360 Pulse the lessons they wished they had received in law school, but instead had to learn on their own once they entered the workplace.

Chitou, the founder of Compli by Osato, which advises health care payors and providers on a broad range of regulatory compliance matters, said it took her years after graduating from Rutgers Law School to understand how her identity should not be limited to the confines of the word "lawyer." Rather, she should integrate working as an attorney into her broader life.

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Osato F. Chitou



Olayemi Olurin



Josephine M. Bahn



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Compli by Osato

"There's a whole other life that's not the law, whether it be our relationships or what we do for joy and pleasure, that has the ability to color our legal lives in a very beautiful way," Chitou said. "But the training is the law 24/7, hustle hustle hustle, bill bill bill. It's an incredible disservice to rising attorneys."

For Olayemi Olurin, law school places an undue emphasis on matters such as class rank or being published in a law journal. What schools emphasize as important often becomes trivial once attorneys have started their careers and begun racking up accomplishments through their work, the St. John's University School of Law graduate said.

Olurin, a public defender with the Legal Aid Society and a political commentator on issues such as police misconduct and the nation's prison system, said it took time for her to understand how many law professors are not necessarily impartial arbiters of students' work, but rather enter the classroom as human beings with their own biases and agendas.

Olurin said she learned that what matters for attorneys' careers is what they do after they graduate, rather than whether a particular professor disagrees with their opinion on a legal matter or thinks that their legal writing is not up to snuff.

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Olayemi Olurin

Legal Aid Society

"Law school is to be treated as a means to an end. It's an exercise. It's a trial in your life. It's a moment. It's a blip," Olurin said.

Josephine M. Bahn, the national chair of the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and an associate in Cozen O'Connor's commercial litigation and construction law practices, said that law schools often don't go deep enough into the practice areas that lawyers are interested in focusing on.

"Law school doesn't necessarily prepare you for the granular level of expertise in a given field that you'll likely need," Bahn said.

The New York Law School graduate said that while ABA-accredited law schools will work to ensure that newly minted lawyers succeed after graduation, her most important lessons have come on the job at Cozen O'Connor, through her work with partners, managers and her mentors.

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Josephine M. Bahn

Cozen O'Connor

"It's called the practice of law for a reason," Bahn said. "You learn by doing, by researching, by putting all of the skills that you learned in law school together, and by putting that final piece of learning the granular levels of law into action."

The legal profession is the third career for Chitou, who previously worked as a schoolteacher and as a social worker. While pursuing a graduate degree in public health, she said she recognized that the law could trump social work as a more powerful tool to impact health care from a regulatory and policy perspective.

While Chitou believes she was more prepared for postgraduate life than her peers because of her previous work experience, she believes law school can also do a better job of training students on the practicalities they may encounter in their careers, such as how they can start their own law firms, how they can use their legal skills to work as consultants or advisers, or how they can launch successful businesses.

Legal education is currently administered from an overly theoretical, academic perspective, as opposed to a more practical, useful model for students looking not only to monetize their studies but apply them to the world they live in, Chitou said.

"There's many folks who can certainly use the brainpower of students who have gone through law school, but the model that is presented emphasizes outcomes such as clerkships or working at a big city law firm," Chitou said.

--Editing by Jill Coffey and Alyssa Miller.